

Oiselle

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Oiselle

by [ylzzirf](#)

Summary

A family turns to religion (and a deceased ancestor) to find a more permanent solution for their troubles.

Our great-grandmother killed her second husband. She killed him with a prayer.

She'd prayed for God to take him out of her life and by the next morning, he'd dropped dead. He had cirrhosis, which certainly would've killed him anyway, but her prayer didn't go unanswered.

She lived to regret it. She lived forty more years — and while her life was happy and restful, she often thought God would suddenly punish her. She looked over her shoulder all the time, especially as she got older. She feared holy retribution.

But we knew better. God had *rewarded* her. And God had rewarded us, with a direct line to Himself.

My cousin and I — lapsed Catholics — weren't Protestants, by the (*happy?*) accident that our parents had married out.

All of the other cousins were good Baptists and Methodists who never sinned — and “good” Baptists and Methodists, people who knew how to sin more discretely. While we didn't go to church, our Catholicism set us apart from the rest of them. We'd done our time in parochial school, and we'd confessed mild sins to bored priests. But our biggest passions — as a thirty-year-old straight woman and a fifty-seven-year-old bisexual man — were the saints. Many of the saints had beautiful portraits, beautiful gowns, and sordid backstories. We loved the drama of Saint Drogo, the patron saint of unattractive people, and the story of Saint Guinefort, who was a man among dogs, or a dog among men.

We'd managed to convince ourselves that, if our Methodist grandmother had performed a miracle in the case of ending her husband's suffering, that perhaps we could convince her to perform a second miracle, so that she could attain Protestant sainthood.

“What would that be?” Michael said. “A shrine in every Hobby Lobby?”

“A lifetime of free meals at Texas Roadhouse, too.”

“I think we ought to look at this more carefully, Kinley,” he said. “Do you really think we could ask Meemaw to kill people for us?”

“I'm going to ask her to intercede. You might do the same. Your ex-wife is a pistol and a bitch. My neighbors, they're evil cun—”

“*Language*,” he chided. “Meemaw never liked the cussing. She won't help answer your prayer, unless you sweeten it up a little bit.”

“I’m going to be gentle about it. Meemaw, I promise not to curse. But I’m asking you, and Michael is asking you, to get these drunk, dishonest, money-loving hate-mongers out of our lives. Please do whatever it takes to remove them, Meemaw. Meemaw *and* God, I mean. I know it’s not my place to bargain, but Michael and I will come back to ... to ... to the Methodist church, if you’ll have us. I ought to do that anyway. I’ll be seeing you, you know, someday. And you’ll be seeing me. And Michael. This Sunday. I promise.”

It took me nearly two “Cowgirls in The Sand” to get out to the church — and that song’s at least ten minutes long. I had to drive down one country road and cut through to another backroad, in a quest to avoid tractors and Amish buggies. The drive gave me time to get reacquainted with Neil Young. *It’s the woman in you that makes you want to play this game.* I felt like I was being warned, until I reminded myself that Neil Young wasn’t a prophet.

Church was an uneventful chore. I paid attention, but it was still kind of dull. I liked the church itself. It was a pole barn and, while the exterior was unassuming, the interior was calm and inviting. Lots of wine-y purples and soft greens. It seemed like a nice place to sit, to think, to get closer to God.

Michael sat at my left, pinched my elbow every so often, and then acted like he wanted me to move farther down the pew, then closer, then back away.

“They’re going to think we’re a father and daughter. I don’t want a daughter, and I’m *not* a father.”

“We practically are, though — a father and daughter. A niece and an uncle, at the very least. And besides, no one thinks we’re father-and-daughter *or* a couple, or anything weird like that. We’re related to half of the people here. They know us. They know who we are.”

“And they know *how* we are,” Michael said. “That’s why they’re all glaring.”

An hour later, we stepped out from the air-conditioned barn and into the heat of the summer sun. It was like walking straight into a fever. This was the time of year when the inside of a car felt like a headache, the hard concrete of the parking lot felt like it would melt off into a river of tar, and the sun seemed like it was pricking your skin from the inside out. I felt like a too-ripe tomato, burning alive on my vine. Going inside the ice-cold church was a respite. I wondered if Heaven would feel like a climate-controlled storage unit.

But now that the service was over, I was reacquainted with the heat of the secular world. 11:30 in the morning — they’d dismissed before the Baptist Church up the road, thank God — and it was already 80°. The soles of my shoes were sticking to the parking lot. I was suddenly despondent and miserable.

“Well, I don’t expect her to answer us right away,” Michael said, one foot on the running board of his truck. “But I know we’ll hear something, even if it’s a slap on the wrist for having asked for something above her pay grade.”

I'd thought hard about whether we'd hear anything, and how we'd be answered. I'd secretly decided that if Meemaw intervened, I didn't want to let anyone know — besides Michael, of course. I just didn't want to tell my friends, in case they had any requests. Maybe that's being selfish — hogging a saint's benediction — but I was worried that it might start weighing heavily against my own soul.

"I don't know, man," I said, leaning back against my car. I'd parked right next to him, and I wondered if we could start carpooling in the future. The parking lot was chock full of sinners, and the traffic was emptying out slowly. The line of cars snaked around the lot, looping back toward us. The cars at the front of the line seemed not to be moving at all.

"Hello," a voice called. I looked over, then down, at a Corvette that was practically scraping the ground. A white-haired man — my dad's brother's brother-in-law, whom I knew by sight and not by name — was leaning out the driver's side window. "Glad to have y'all back. Ms. Oiselle was a special lady, and she'd be glad that y'all are coming back to church again."

"Thank you and ... and everyone here for having us," I said, realizing that I ought to say more, but that I didn't know what else to say. I never knew what to say, at a funeral or a church service. God was watching, and that was almost too much pressure.

"Ah! Lots of people come here," I blurted, suddenly flinging out the first thought that came to mind.

"Yes," he said. "Actually, that's why I wanted to stop y'all. I wanted to tell y'all that traffic isn't normally this bad. It's bad, but it's not always like this. People normally just turn right and peel on out, but they can't this morning. My Waze says that there's been a crash out on the highway."

"Well —" Michael said.

"Ah, but there's more to the story. Joe and Meribeth — you know *them* — were up there on the sidewalk. She already had Facebook open on her phone. Said that the county sheriff's office has already posted about it, about the road closure. Two-vehicle accident. Head-on collision. They sent for the coroner, so at least one of them died."

"Oh, no," I said. "On a Sunday morning. That's a terrible — well, it's always a terrible time. But ... on a *Sunday*."

I let the word hang in the air, and I looked at Michael, and he immediately said what I'd been thinking.

"We'll be praying for them."

"Absolutely," White Hair said. "God bless y'all. Stay safe out on the road. You never know who you'll meet out there."

Two minutes after I stepped inside and ripped off my pantyhose, my phone started buzzing. I ignored it.

It buzzed again and again, again and *again*, and I finally got the message.

“What?” I said. “‘Dja leave your wallet in the collection plate?”

“Kinley,” Michael said. “Kinley, go to Facebook. Everyone’s talking about it.”

I opened Facebook, scrolled through the posts, and saw photos from the crash site.

“Three people dead, all because of a drunk driver,” the top comment said. Many of the follow-up replies were festooned with praying hands emojis. I remembered that the praying hands were originally designed to look like a high-five. I felt nervous and queasy, but I felt a sudden calmness, scrolling from comment to comment.

“They were ALL drunk,” someone wrote. “They were nasty people. Hate drunk drivers so fckin much.” The comment had four reactions — two *cares* and two *angries*.

I scrolled back up to the pictures. Even though it was beyond totaled — and looked like it had flipped end over end — I recognized my neighbors’ Camry.

“Am I looking at a miracle?” I said.

“I can hardly breathe. LeeAnne was driving that Tundra that hit them. I can’t believe it. I can’t believe it. I —”

“Pull yourself together. We didn’t cause it. We just asked for a miracle. If anything, your ex is the one who made this happen. She must’ve been driving —”

“Drunk.”

“Yes,” I said. “But why was she driving a *truck*?”

“It was her boyfriend’s.”

“Well,” I said, lamely. “He should’ve done a better job of hiding his keys.”

We both said nothing. I just walked over to the front window, and I looked at the empty driveway across the street.

Three weeks later, we were back in church. We kept our knowledge to ourselves — but our faith was strengthened to the point that we sat near the front of the church. We got up early, to

make sure we didn't miss the first service. We wanted to be seen — by our neighbors, our cousins, our grandmother.

We knew she saw us. As we sat under the watchful, wary eye of the first known Protestant saint, we felt an inner peace.

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